

Democracy under pressure: politics and policies in times of crisis I

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Título da Comunicação: *Aren't there any alternatives"? Power and Discourse in Portuguese Austerity Politics*

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RESUMO

This paper presents an in-depth case study of governmental decision-making in Portugal from 2010 to 2015. To obtain a full understanding of what really happened behind the closed doors of international meetings, we triangulated different types of data: face-to-face interviews with policy-makers, international lenders and Trade Union representatives; investigations by journalists; and IMF and EU official documents. Lastly, we analyze the official discourses of both the former and current Prime Ministers. We show that the sovereign debt crisis and the bailout have strengthened executives' independence from other national actors. The perceived need for 'credibility' to avoid a 'negative' reaction from the markets - later associated with the conditions of the bailout - concurrently gave the executives a legitimate justification to concentrate power in their hands and a strong argument to counter the opponents of their proposed reforms. Consequently, Portuguese ministers— when they favored policies that were in congruence with those supported by international actors – were able to use the crisis to advance their own agenda. When they disagreed with Troika representatives, ministers and international lenders engaged in a negotiating process, the final outcome of which depended on the actors' bargaining powers. Finally, contrary to what we expected, we did not find a strong gap between Prime Ministers' official discourse and this state of affairs – thus showing limited evidence of discursive depolitization.